

334

B6 U6

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 497 572 8

ADDRESS  
OF THE  
PRESIDENT OF THE  
UNITED STATES

AT THE  
CELEBRATION OF THE SEMICENTENNIAL  
OF THE FOUNDING OF THE CITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

OCTOBER 26, 1921



WASHINGTON

1921

F324  
E626



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS  
RECEIVED  
NOV 22 1921  
DOCUMENTS DIVISION

## ADDRESS AT BIRMINGHAM, OCTOBER 26, 1921.

---

MR. MAYOR, CITIZENS OF BIRMINGHAM, AND PEOPLE OF THE SOUTH: I have been wondering, as we have seen the Birmingham district and the marvels of this region's industrial development, whether any of us have yet quite realized the significance of the fact that Birmingham has been called "The Magic City." The basic, characteristic industry on which modern civilization rests is iron and steel; and Birmingham is the world's last word in development of the iron and steel industries.

We have come here to pay tribute to the marvelous achievement of a brief half century to which this city and its industries stand as a monument. They testify to us how far the South has progressed in a single generation: the generation since slavery was abolished and the rule of free labor and unfettered industrial opportunity became the rule of all of our great Republic.

Somewhere my attention has been called to the legend, possibly a historical fact, that when Fernando De Soto was leading his expedition of exploration and conquest from Florida to the Mississippi, some of his metal workers not only discovered the wonderful deposits of coal, limestone, and iron ore in this area and told De Soto that here was an even greater treasure house than that which he was seeking; not an El Dorado of precious metals, but the opportunity for making the world's dominating iron industry. I have been told, I do not know whether it is literally true, that the first reduction of iron in this district was actually accomplished by members of the De Soto party who supplied certain of the expedition's needs by smelting some of these wonderful ores. But De Soto was led on by the mirage which filled his vision, and instead of the pot of gold he sought, he found the mighty Mississippi, and in it his grave.

So far as concerns more modern development, it appears that General Andrew Jackson also utilized your mineral and metal riches. When he was on his march to New Orleans for the great battle in which the yeomanry of the South won the single notable land victory of the War of 1812, his metallurgists discovered that from these easily smelted ores they could supply their requirements of iron, of which they stood in great need. Accordingly, they erected rude furnaces and reduced considerable quantities of iron. From that time on there

appears to have been more or less sporadic and intermittent utilization of these deposits, and during the Civil War they provided a considerable part of the needs of the South.

In this connection I have many times wished that there might be a wider appreciation of the energy, resourcefulness, and genius for industrial development which the people of the South demonstrated during that war. Essentially an aristocratic agricultural region, the South suddenly confronted the need to turn out iron and steel, and a vast complexity of their products which were absolutely essential to the conduct of the war. Not only did they arise to the occasion, but they gave what I have regarded as one of the greatest demonstrations in all history of the possibilities of adaptation, organization, and industrial development under stress of great necessity. We will do well to recognize that the industrial achievement of the South during the Civil War was one of the marvels resulting from that unhappy conflict. It marked the beginning of that diversification of industry which has made the South of to-day an industrial as well as an agricultural empire. I have often wished that some inspired son of the South might one day devote the time and effort necessary to record the history of that Aladdin-like industrial wonder which was a large part of the story of the South in the civil contest. It is one of the phases of American history that has had too little understanding attention. When we have studied the Civil War we have been so engrossed with military and political aspects that we have slighted the industrial and economic phases. I am going to venture, therefore, the suggestion that a comprehensive study of that aspect of the war period would be of inestimable value to the South and to the great story of our national progress. Not only would it constitute an eloquent testimony to the genius and devotion of our southern people, but it would present a picture of opening opportunity and widening horizon whose contemplation would challenge every remaining vestige of prejudice and sectional antagonism.

It has been a truism that the War between the States started the Nation as a whole in its way of colossal industrial growth. But I have wished that the particular story of that war-time experience in the South might be better known. I have been told of the almost overnight development of munition factories out of smithies; of the expansion of railroad repair shops into locomotive works; how ship-yards, ordnance plants, powder factories were conjured up and put at work almost in the twinkling of an eye; of improvised industrial processes and mechanical contrivances, not a few of which have been of permanent value, some of them fairly revolutionary. We will, I am sure, be forgiven if, as Americans, we remind ourselves that wooden navies had fought each other for thousands of years until Americans fell to fighting among themselves. Then came iron

fighting craft—came so quickly and unanimously that both sides had their first armored warships ready at the same moment, so well matched that they fought to a draw. It was a revolution; yet it was only one incident in this matching of American genius and resourcefulness in titanic struggle.

The railway and the telegraph were first bidden to the service of war on a great scale during our civil contest. The huge ordnance which both North and South created and used was as sensational in that day as the most startling constructions of the World War were more than a generation later. In both South and North our people learned and demonstrated what it means to mobilize all the human, industrial, financial, scientific resources of a great community for the purposes of war. That, indeed, was the most characteristic and most revolutionary development of the struggle. When we had done with our war we had well-nigh made over the whole art of war. The old things were gone forever. By land or by sea both its material and its methods were sweepingly changed. Glory and glamour had been taken out of it and in their place had been put the grim, hard reality of whole peoples measuring against each other their last ounce of power and resources.

In that contest of industry and resources the South started with a fearful handicap; a handicap so great that its accomplishments constituted one of the industrial wonders of all time. It is to this wonder that I have wanted to call attention to-day, for I have felt that it has never been appraised as it ought to be. From that contest the South emerged, not only with the foundation of industrial greatness securely laid but freed from the incubus of a labor system that had from colonial times chained it to the status of an almost purely agricultural community.

The industrial and commercial development of States and peoples has always been strikingly influenced by their wars; perhaps even more than their social and political development. That older war founded industry in the South under stress of sternest necessity; and so we may recognize in your Birmingham district and its industrial splendor one of the fine products of the industrial revolution which was forced upon the whole South.

We are gathered to-day to celebrate the semicentenary of the founding of Birmingham. That this wonder could be wrought in so brief a time tells us how fast our modern world moves; so fast that we are wont to forget our yesterdays before our to-days are fairly begun; so absorbing in its concerns of the present that too often we have neither time nor interest for the morrow. Yet there never was a time when we needed so much to study our past and, in the light of its lessons, give earnest thought to the to-morrows. So I have thought that here in your Magic City, whose story seems a very compress of

yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow, it may be proper to suggest a few thoughts regarding the critical times which are faced by our country and all countries and some of the issues which command our consideration.

Exhausted and affrighted by the horrors of the World War, the nations are seeking means to prevent repetition of such an experience. They see the need for effective reform in international relationships and, along with this, for many alterations and adaptations of domestic institutions which will better fit them for the new time. Our own country, though its necessities are less onerous, its difficulties not so grievous as those of many others, has yet occasion to consider wherein it may better its methods, adjust itself to the new relationships, and equip itself for the new sort of struggle that lies ahead. Concerning one phase of this national problem, I want to say a few words.

If the Civil War marked the beginnings of industrialism in a South which had previously been almost entirely agricultural, the World War brought us to full recognition that the race problem is national rather than merely sectional. There are no authentic statistics, but it is common knowledge that the World War was marked by a great migration of colored people to the North and West. They were attracted by the demand for labor and the higher wages offered. The slow movement had been in progress for decades before, but it was vastly accelerated because of the war, and has continued at only a slackened pace since. It has brought the question of race closer to North and West, and I believe it has served to modify somewhat the views of those sections on this question. It has made the South realize its industrial dependence on the labor of the black man and made the North realize the difficulties of the community in which two greatly differing races are brought to live side by side. I should say that it has been responsible for a larger charity on both sides, a beginning of better understanding; and in the light of that better understanding perhaps we shall be able to consider this problem together as a problem of all sections and of both races, in whose solution the best intelligence of both must be enlisted.

Indeed, we will be wise to recognize it as wider yet. Whoever will take the time to read and ponder Mr. Lothrop Stoddard's book on *The Rising Tide of Color*, or, say, the thoughtful review of some recent literature of this question which Mr. F. D. Lugard presented in a recent *Edinburg Review*, must realize that our race problem here in the United States is only a phase of a race issue that the whole world confronts. Surely we shall gain nothing by blinking the facts, by refusing to give thought to them. That is not the American way of approaching such issues.



In another way the World War modified the elements of this problem. Thousands of black men, serving their country just as patriotically as did the white men, were transported overseas and experienced the life of countries where their color aroused less of antagonism than it does here. Many of them aspire to go to Europe to live.

A high-grade colored soldier told me that the war brought his race the first real conception of citizenship—the first full realization that the flag was their flag, to fight for, to be protected by them, and also to protect them. He was sure that the opportunity to learn what patriotism meant was a real opportunity to his race.

These things lead one to hope that we shall find an adjustment of relations between the two races, in which both can enjoy full citizenship, the full measure of usefulness to the country and of opportunity for themselves, and in which recognition and reward shall at last be distributed in proportion to individual deserts, regardless of race or color. Mr. Lugard, in his recent essay, after surveying the world's problem of races, concludes thus:

“Here then is the true conception of the interrelation of color—complete uniformity in ideals, absolute equality in the paths of knowledge and culture, equal opportunity for those who strive, equal admiration for those who achieve; in matters social and racial a separate path, each pursuing his own inherited traditions, preserving his own race purity and race pride; equality in things spiritual; agreed divergence in the physical and material.”

Here, it has seemed to me, is suggestion of the true way out. Politically and economically there need be no occasion for great and permanent differentiation, for limitations of the individual's opportunity, provided that on both sides there shall be recognition of the absolute divergence in things social and racial. When I suggest the possibility of economic equality between the races, I mean it in precisely the same way and to the same extent that I would mean it if I spoke of equality of economic opportunity as between members of the same race. In each case I would mean equality proportioned to the honest capacities and deserts of the individual.

Men of both races may well stand uncompromisingly against every suggestion of social equality. Indeed, it would be helpful to have that word “equality” eliminated from this consideration; to have it accepted on both sides that this is not a question of social equality, but a question of recognizing a fundamental, eternal, and inescapable difference. We shall have made real progress when we develop an attitude in the public and community thought of both races which recognizes this difference.

Colonizing countries everywhere have in recent times been more and more dealing with the problem from this point of view. The

British commonwealth of nations and races confronts it, and has been seeking its solution along the lines here suggested. There is possibility of our learning something applicable to our own country from the British. It is true that there is a great difference between bringing into our own land the colonists of another race and going out to another land and subjecting it and its people to the rule of an alien race. Yet the two cases have so many elements of similarity that it seems to me the experience of each must furnish some light upon the other.

Take first the political aspect. I would say let the black man vote when he is fit to vote; prohibit the white man voting when he is unfit to vote. Especially would I appeal to the self-respect of the colored race. I would inculcate in it the wish to improve itself as a distinct race, with a heredity, a set of traditions, an array of aspirations all its own. Out of such racial ambitions and pride will come natural segregations, without narrowing any rights, such as are proceeding in both rural and urban communities now in Southern States, satisfying natural inclinations and adding notably to happiness and contentment.

On the other hand I would insist upon equal educational opportunity for both. This does not mean that both would become equally educated within a generation or two generations or ten generations. Even men of the same race do not accomplish such an equality as that. They never will. The Providence that endowed men with widely unequal capacities and capabilities and energies did not intend any such thing.

But there must be such education among the colored people as will enable them to develop their own leaders, capable of understanding and sympathizing with such a differentiation between the races as I have suggested—leaders who will inspire the race with proper ideals of race pride, of national pride, of an honorable destiny, an important participation in the universal effort for advancement of humanity as a whole. Racial amalgamation there can not be. Partnership of the races in developing the highest aims of all humanity there must be if humanity, not only here but everywhere, is to achieve the ends which we have set for it.

I can say to you people of the South, both white and black, that the time has passed when you are entitled to assume that this problem of races is peculiarly and particularly your problem. More and more it is becoming a problem of the North; more and more it is the problem of Africa, of South America, of the Pacific, of the South Seas, of the world. It is the problem of democracy everywhere, if we mean the things we say about democracy as the ideal political state.

Coming as Americans do from many origins of race, tradition, language, color, institutions, heredity; engaged as we are in the huge effort to work an honorable national destiny from so many different elements; the one thing we must sedulously avoid is the development of group and class organizations in this country. There has been time when we heard too much about the labor vote, the business vote, the Irish vote, the Scandinavian vote, the Italian vote, and so on. But the demagogues who would array class against class and group against group have fortunately found little to reward their efforts. That is because, despite the demagogues, the idea of our oneness as Americans has risen superior to every appeal to mere class and group. And so I would wish it might be in this matter of our national problem of races. I would accept that a black man can not be a white man, and that he does not need and should not aspire to be as much like a white man as possible in order to accomplish the best that is possible for him. He should seek to be, and he should be encouraged to be, the best possible black man, and not the best possible imitation of a white man.

It is a matter of the keenest national concern that the South shall not be encouraged to make its colored population a vast reservoir of ignorance, to be drained away by the processes of migration into all other sections. That is what has been going on in recent years at a rate so accentuated that it has caused this question of races to be, as I have already said, no longer one of a particular section. Just as I do not wish the South to be politically entirely of one party; just as I believe that is bad for the South, and for the rest of the country as well, so I do not want the colored people to be entirely of one party. I wish that both the tradition of a solidly Democratic South and the tradition of a solidly Republican black race might be broken up. Neither political sectionalism nor any system of rigid groupings of the people will in the long run prosper our country. I want to see the time come when black men will regard themselves as full participants in the benefits and duties of American citizenship; when they will vote for Democratic candidates, if they prefer the Democratic policy on tariff or taxation, or foreign relations, or what-not; and when they will vote the Republican ticket only for like reasons. We can not go on, as we have gone for more than a half century, with one great section of our population, numbering as many people as the entire population of some significant countries of Europe, set off from real contribution to solving our national issues, because of a division on race lines.

With such convictions one must urge the people of the South to take advantage of their superior understanding of this problem and

to assume an attitude toward it that will deserve the confidence of the colored people. Likewise, I plead with my own political party to lay aside every program that looks to lining up the black man as a mere political adjunct. Let there be an end of prejudice and of demagoguery in this line. Let the South understand the menace which lies in forcing upon the black race an attitude of political solidarity. The greater hope, the dissipation of hatred, the discouragement of dangerous passions lie in persuading the black people to forget old prejudices and to have them believe that, under the rule of whatever political party, they would be treated just as other people are treated, guaranteed all the rights that people of other colors enjoy, and made, in short, to regard themselves as citizens of a country and not of a particular race.

Every consideration, it seems to me, brings us back at last to the question of education. When I speak of education as a part of this race question, I do not want the States or the Nation to attempt to educate people, whether white or black, into something they are not fitted to be. I have no sympathy with the half-baked altruism that would overstock us with doctors and lawyers, of whatever color, and leave us in need of people fit and willing to do the manual work of a workaday world. But I would like to see an education that would fit every man not only to do his particular work as well as possible but to rise to a higher plane if he would deserve it. For that sort of education I have no fears, whether it be given to a black man or a white man. From that sort of education, I believe, black men, white men, the whole Nation, would draw immeasurable benefit.

It is probable that as a nation we have come to the end of the period of very rapid increase in our population. Recent legislation to restrict immigration will be in part responsible for a slackening ratio of increase. The new immigrants have multiplied in numbers much the more rapidly, but as the immigrants become Americanized, amalgamated into the citizenry, the tendency has been toward less rapid multiplication. So restricted immigration will reduce the rate of increase, and force us back upon our older population to find people to do the simpler, physically harder, manual tasks. This will require some difficult readjustments. It has been easy, indeed, but it has not been good for the people of our older stock, that a constant inflow in immigration made it possible to crowd off these less attractive and profitable tasks upon the newcomers. I don't think it has been good for what the old Latins called the national *virtue*. That is a word I have always liked, employed in the Roman sense. I wish we might have adopted it into our vocabulary, in this sense. It strikes me as a good deal better than *morale*. Anyhow,

we are under necessity to raise honest, hard, manual work to a new dignity if we are to get it done. We will have to make its compensations more generous, materially, and, if I may say it, spiritually; to make usefulness of service, rather than spotlessness of hands, the test of whatever social recognition depends on the individual's occupation. I confess a large disgust with all such classifications, and I earnestly bespeak an attitude toward good, honorable, hard work that will end them. I do not want to coddle and patronize labor; I want us all to get out, put on blue denims, roll up our sleeves, let our hands be honorably soiled, and do the work. That's what we've got to do, if we are to get on. We must do it, and be glad we can; for there is small chance that we will ever again have such armies of laborers landing on these shores, as have come in the past.

In anticipation of such a condition the South may well recognize that North and West are likely to continue their drafts upon its colored population, and that if the South wishes to keep its fields producing and its industry still expanding it will have to compete for the services of the colored man. If it will realize its need for him and deal quite fairly with him, the South will be able to keep him in such numbers as your activities make desirable. At any rate, here is a problem and it is pressing for settlement.

Is it not possible, then, that in the long era of readjustment upon which we are entering for the Nation to lay aside old prejudices and old antagonisms and in the broad, clear light of nationalism enter upon a constructive policy in dealing with these intricate issues? Just as we shall prove ourselves capable of doing this we shall insure the industrial progress, the agricultural security, the social and political safety of our whole country regardless of race or sections and along the line of ideals superior to every consideration of groups or class, of race or color or section or prejudice.

Here are the reflexes of magical industrial development, here are the fruits in the making of a nation and its commitment to free productivity and trade. There is a materialism which sometimes seems sordid, but on the material foundation we have expanded in soul, and we have seen this Republic the example to freedom aspiring throughout the world. We wish to cling to all that is good. We want to preserve the inheritance over which we fought because our conflict made it more precious. But we wish to go on as well as preserve.

The march of a great people is not a blind one. We can not be unmindful of human advancement. We wish to be more than apace with progress—we wish our America leading and choosing safe paths. Fifty years is a narrow span. Yet the marvel of

Birmingham is less than the marvel of our astounding America. And we mean to go on. If we are just and honest in administering justice, if we are alive to perils and meet them in conscience and courage, the achievement of your first half century will be magnified tenfold in the second half, and the glory of your city and your country will be reflected in the happiness of a great people, greater than we dream, and grander for understanding and the courage to be right.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 497 572 8